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LITERARY CURIOSITIES.

BY H. K. BROWN.

ISRAELI has not caught all the curious of English Literature, nor Dr Griswold, in his edition of the English work, all the singular things in American letters. We have in our portfolio some original notes and memoranda worthy of reproduction, and not without interest to the general reader as well as to the professed man of letters.

The Hymn,

"Before Jehovah's awful throne,
Ye nations, bow with sacred joy."

is the amended, by Charles Wesley, from the older one by Watts, reading:

"Nations attend before His throne,
With solemn fear and sacred joy;"

and vastly improved in the emendation. And for Watts—

"He dies! the heavenly lover dies;
The tidings strike a doleful sound
On my poor heart-strings. Deep he lies
In the cold caverns of the ground."

Wesley gave us, as a substitute, the now memorable—

"He dies! the friend of sinners dies.
Lo! Salem's daughters weep around;
A solemn darkness veils the skies,
A sudden trembling shakes the ground."

In the original manuscript copy of Gray's celebrated "Elegy," after the 18th stanza, were the four following stanzas, with which he intended to conclude the noble poem; but the idea of the hoary-headed swain occurring to him, he rejected them, and continued the Elegy as we shall find when we reach the 19th stanza:

The thoughtless world to majesty may bow,
Exalt the brave and idolize success;
But more to innocence their safety owe,
Than power or genius ere conspired to bless.

And thou who, mindful of th' unhonored dead,
Dost in these notes their artless tale relate;
By night and lonely contemplation led
To wander in the gloomy walks of fate.

Hark! how the sacred calm that breathes around,
Bids every fierce, tumultuous passion cease;
In still small accents whisp'ring from the ground,
A grateful earnest of eternal peace.

No more with reason and thyself a strife,
Give anxious cares and endless wishes room;
But thro' the cool sequestered vale of life,
Pursue the silent tenor of thy doom.

There is a singular history connected with Pope's "Dying Christian to his Soul." The London *Athenaeum* produces two versions of the poem, and thus refers to their production:—

"Considering that this beautiful Ode has been for more than a century the admiration of everybody—a sort of inspired thing, struck off at a moment, in 1712—it may be interesting to compare the copy sent to Caryll in June, 1713, with the "warm from the brain" copy, which is assumed to have been written in 1712, which was first published in 1736, and which has continued "warm from the brain" from that hour to the present.

June, 1713.

CHRISTIANI MORIENTIS AD ANIMAM.

1.

Vital spark of heavenly flame!
Dost thou quit this mortal frame?
Trembling, hoping, ling'ring, flying;
Oh, the pain, the bliss of dying!
Cease, fond nature, cease thy strife,
Let me languish into life.

2.

My swimming eyes are sick of light,
The less'ning world forsakes my sight,
A damp creeps cold o'er every part,
Nor moves my pulse, nor heaves my heart,
The hov'ring soul is on the wing;
Where, mighty Death! oh, where's thy sting?

3.

I hear around soft music play,
And angels beckon me away!
Calm as forgiven hermits rest,
I'll sleep—or infants at the breast,
Till the last trumpet rends the ground;
Then wake with pleasure at the sound.

1736.

THE DYING CHRISTIAN TO HIS SOUL.

Ode.

1.

Vital spark of heav'nly flame!
Quit, oh, quit this mortal frame;
Trembling, hoping, ling'ring, flying,
Oh, the pain, the bliss of dying!
Cease, fond nature, cease thy strife,
And let me languish into life.

2.

Hark! they whisper; Angels say,
Sister spirit, come away!
What is this absorbs me quite?
Steals my senses, shuts my sight,
Drowns my spirits, draws my breath?
Tell me, my soul, can this be death?

3.

The world recedes; it disappears!
Heav'n opens on my eyes, my ears
With sounds seraphic ring:
Lend, lend your wings! I mount! I fly!
O Grave! where is thy Victory?
O Death! where is thy sting?

Either poem is fine. The last version is that with which the author's name is associated, but the former is good enough for any poet of modern fame.

How great the contrast between the sentiments of this devotional poem and the "Prayer" by the same hand! Although a production of true poetic genius, it were better for the author's fame if it had never been written. As the poem now stands, it is greatly altered from the original draft (as, indeed, most of his works are, since with every new edition, he gave the printer *corrected* copy). In the first draft of the "Prayer," before the stanza commencing—

"What conscience dictates to be done,"

the following verse had place:—

"Can sins of moment claim the rod
Of everlasting fires?
And that offend great Nature's God,
Which Nature's self inspires."

It is thought this proved too "liberal" even for Pope's free-thinking friends, and was stricken out in deference to their wishes. But, poetically, the figure, *rod of fires*, is a bad one; and, aside from the immoral sentiment of the verse, the figure ought to have forced the verse into banishment.

It was of this stanza that Dr. Johnson spoke when he said the idea contained in the last two lines was borrowed from Guarini's "Pastor Fido." This work Pope seems to have studied closely, for much of his rhymed metaphysics appears to be drawn from that source.

Some time since we called attention to the fact that Hood's "Fair Inez" was a mere reproduction of Burns's "Bonnie Lieslie." The charge challenged the notice of critics, some declaring against the asserted likeness. But it is now conceded that the two poems are alike in all leading respects; and as Burns wrote first and as Hood was familiar with the Scots man's exquisite creations, it must be inferred that the author of the very beautiful "Inez" borrowed freely from his brother poet. We can only wonder that the great similarity remained so long un-

noticed and unmarked, by such men as Jeffrey, Hazlitt, and Edgar A. Poe.

A singular case of critical misapprehension has come to our knowledge. The late Dr. Griswold commenting upon the well known poem "The Red Hunters," took occasion to introduce its author as follows: "Metta Victoria Fuller is one of the brilliant young writers of the West. That she has imagination and vigorous diction none will doubt who reads the following picturesque and stirring lyric. In many of her pieces, however, we regret to see careless misapplication of words, and such "poetical licenses" as brought into disrepute, seventy years ago, the compositions of Mrs. Thrall, Mrs. Robinson, and Mr. Merry. Miss Fuller is, in every way, superior to any of those writers; but, fine as her powers are, she may be turned aside from Parnassus with the Della Cruscan unless she studies an appropriate precision in language, and gives continued heed to those details of art of which a neglect is most conspicuous in writers of genius." In confirmation of these strictures he gives "The Red Hunters" *with the corrections demanded by the "details of art."* We give, in alternate stanzas, the emended copy and the original, that the reader may see what silly results follow upon the labors of some commentators. Original in italics:

THE RED HUNTERS.

AS EMENDED BY DR. GRISWOLD

Out of the wood at midnight,
The swift red hunters came;
The prairies were their hunting grounds,
The bison were their game.
Their spears were of glistening silver,
Their crests were of blue and gold,
And driven by panting winds of heaven,
Their shining chariots rolled.

*Out of the wood at midnight,
The swift red hunters came;
The prairie was their hunting ground,
The bison were their game.
Their spears were of glist'ning silver,
Their crests were of blue and gold;
Driven by the panting winds of heaven,
Their shining chariots rolled.*

That unshorn, wide-sweeping wilderness;
Oh, what a strife was there!
What a shouting, what a threatening cry,
What a tumult on the air!
The huntsmen's garments over the wheels,
Streamed backward red and far;
They floated their purple banners
In the face of every star.

*Over that level hunting ground—
Oh, what a strife was there!
What a shouting—what a threat'ning cry—
What a murmur on the air!
Their garments over the glowing wheels
Streamed backward red and far;
They flouted their purple banners
In the face of each pale star.*

Under their tread the autumn flowers
In millions withering lay
From their feet, or from those golden wheels,
They could not shrink away;
Close, and crashing together,
The thronging chariots rolled,
While anon before his fellows
Leaped out some hunter bold.

*Under their tread the autumn flowers
By myriads withering lay;
Poor things! that from those golden wheels
Could nowhere shrink away!
Close, and crashing together,
The envious chariots rolled,
While, anon, before his fellows
Leaped out some hunter bold.*

Their black hair, thick and lowering,
Above their wild eyes hung,
And about their frowning foreheads,
Like wreaths of nightshade clung;
"The bison! ho, the bison!"
They cried and answered back,
While the frightened creatures stood aghast,
To see them on their track.

*Their hot breath, thick and lowering,
About their wild eyes hung,
And, around their frowning foreheads,
Like wreaths of nightshade clung.
The bison! ho, the bison!"
They cried, and answered back
Poor herds of frightened creatures,
With such hunters on their track!*

With a weary, lumbering swiftness,
They seek the river's side
Driven by those hunters from their sleep
Into the chilling tide.
Some face the foe, with anguish
Dilating their brute eyes,
Till the spears of silver strike them down,
And in gory death each lies.

*With a weary, lumbering swiftness,
They sought the river's side,
Driven by those hunters from their sleep
Into its chilling tide.
Some face their foe, with anguish
Dilating their brute eyes—
The spears of silver strike them low,
And dead each suppliant lies.*

Now by the brightening river
The red hunters stand at bay;
Vain their appalling splendor—
The waters shield their prey;
Into the waves with baffled rage,
They leap in fear's despite;
And the golden wheels roll roaring in,
And leave the dead with Night.

*Now, by the brightening river
The red hunters stand at bay;
Vain their appalling splendor—
The river shields their prey!
Into its waves, with baffled rage,
They leap in death's despite—
Their golden wheels roll roaring in,
And leave the withered night.*

As a description of a prairie on fire—of the herds of bison fleeing before the roaring wheels of flame, pierced by the tongues and spears of fire, until the river swallows them up, and leaves the fire to die upon its shore—this poem is pronounced, in its original shape, one of the finest efforts of our literature; and that Dr. Griswold should have had the assurance to alter it as above noted, argues either a total ignorance of the meaning of the poem, or a literary egotism remarkable for its obtuseness and prosy character. Not a word or line of the *emendations* but detracts from the dignity and power of the original.

We record this case of mal-treatment as a curious one, considering the position which the annotator held in our literature, as editor and critic. In many minds it will serve to give force to the impression that Dr. Griswold was not qualified, in an æsthetic sense, at least, for the offices which he assumed of director and editor for American poetic literature.

Dr. Griswold, however, among critics, is not alone in his mistakes. The great Jeffrey must come in for the castigation sure to be inflicted by posterity for an injustice toward an author. Of Montgomery and his works, the Edinburgh Reviewer had the temerity to write:—

"We took compassion on Mr. Montgomery at his first appearance, conceiving him to be some slender youth of seventeen, intoxicated with weak tea and the praises of sentimental ensigns, and other provincial *literati*, and tempted, in that situation, to commit a feeble outrage on the public, of which the recollection would be a sufficient punishment. A third edition, however, is too alarming to be passed over in silence; and though we are perfectly persuaded that in less than three years no one will know *The Wanderer of Switzerland*, or any of the other poems in this collection, still, we think ourselves called upon to interfere to prevent, as far as in us lies, the mischief that may arise from the intermediate prevalence of so distressing an epidemic." Oh! what judgment!